Toward a Comprehensive Framework

for Accelerating Reading Achievement in the Primary Grades

Robert Lynn Canady and Carol E. Canady

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Authors' Note

Robert Lynn Canady is professor emeritus and former chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Virginia.

Carol E. Canady currently is a reading specialist in a Virginia elementary school, and she has served as a literacy consultant for school districts in six states. She also has been a primary grade teacher, literacy specialist/coach, and university professor at three Ohio universities.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Robert Lynn Canady at rlynncanady@aol.com. His web address is www.robertlynncanady.com.

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"The more that you read, the more things that you know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go." —*Dr. Seuss, I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!, 1978*

Whether children learn to read "on time" is dependent on a wide range of home and school factors. Who are their parents? Where do they live? What school do they attend? Who is the superintendent? Who is the principal? What do the administrators know about the consequences of children not learning to read on time? What are the values that guide their budgets and personnel selections? Most important, who are their teachers, particularly in Grades PK-3? Although many of these factors can be thought of as "luck of the draw," teachers and school administrators can implement research-based best practices to accelerate their students' literacy achievement.

Historically, elementary schools have been organized and operated as if all teachers were equal in developing competent readers; yet we know this is not true. We know that some students receive highly skilled literacy teachers, while others receive less skilled literacy teachers. We also know that at-risk PK-3 students who are taught by less than highly-skilled teachers for two or more consecutive years are unlikely to ever fully recover (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Presley, White, & Gong, 2005).

In this document, we discuss practices resulting in the current state of our nation's performance in reading. Then, we propose a framework for accelerating literacy achievement to address the factors schools can control, thereby maximizing student opportunity to achieve on or above grade level reading performance, in most cases by the end of grade 1, or at least by the end of grade 3.

Literacy Today

Although national reading performance for fourth-graders has increased since 1992, it has not changed significantly since 2011, with 66% of our nation's fourth-graders reading at below proficient levels in 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). A low level of reading proficiency has been particularly pronounced among low-income children, defined as children who receive free or reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In 2009, "83% of children from low-income families-and 85% of low-income students who attend high poverty schools-failed to reach the 'proficient' level" on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, p.7). Essentially, 6.6 million of the 7.9 million low-income children (83%) are at increased risk of failing to graduate from high school based on not achieving NAEP's proficiency standard in reading by the end of grade 3 (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). These results, coupled with research showing that students who are not proficient in reading by grade 4 tend to remain below grade level, mean that "[r]eading proficiently by the end of third grade can be a 'make-or-break' benchmark in a child's educational development" (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, p. 9).

According to Allington (2012), at best, currently we are providing students who have not achieved proficiency in reading (i.e., not reading on or above grade level) with 20-30 minutes of reading instruction above and beyond regular classroom instruction, but this amount of time is not sufficient. For the remaining six plus hours of the school day, few students who are behind are receiving appropriate instruction to "catch up" to their on- or above-grade-level peers, and few receive access to appropriate reading

materials and resources throughout the school day.

Although reading proficiency rates on the NAEP improved slightly between 2009 and 2015 for most demographic groups (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015), large disparities still exist based on certain characteristics including race, disability status, and English language learners. In terms of race/ethnicity, 82% of African-American students scored *below proficient*, 79% of Hispanic students scored *below proficient*, and 79% of American Indian/Alaska Native students scored *below proficient* in NAEP reading in 2015 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). In comparison, 54% of Caucasian students scored *below proficient*, while 43% of Asian/Pacific Islanders scored *below proficient* (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). These percentages illustrate vividly the racial/ethnic disparities in student reading achievement across the nation.

The Need for Reading Acceleration

The reading achievement gap in our schools is explained in part by the Matthew Effect in Reading,[1] wherein initially disadvantaged students have a progressively difficult time catching up (Walberg & Tsai, 1983; Wren, 2000). "The very children who are reading well and who have good vocabularies will read more, learn more word meanings, and hence read even better. Children with inadequate vocabularies – who read slowly and without enjoyment – read less, and as a result have slower development of vocabulary knowledge, which inhibits further growth in reading ability" (Stanovich, 1986, p. 381; Hiebert & Kamil, 2005).

After a certain point, if students do not succeed in achieving the necessary

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[1] "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Matthew 25:29). Often repeated as "The rich get richer, while the poor get poorer."

preparation and have not mastered grade-level skills, they cannot or will not benefit from the time they spend in school because of their literacy deficits. Most at-risk students are, on average, a year behind in reading when they enter kindergarten (Bernstein, West, Newsham, & Reid, 2014). Moreover, some of these students will experience chronic absenteeism throughout kindergarten, thus falling even further behind (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Chang & Romero, 2008). Soon *after* kindergarten, literacy doors start closing. By Grade 4, doors close for the majority of students who have not mastered grade-level reading skills. They are then left with various types of interventions which serve as Band-aids to cover reading deficits for the remainder of their school years – and possibly for their lives. Close to 90% of poor readers in Grade 1 go on to be poor readers in Grade 4, after which it costs eight times more to correct the deficiencies (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010; Juel, 1988; McNamara, Scissons, & Gutknecth, 2011). Their failure to improve increases the likelihood that they will be under-educated or worse, drop out of school entirely; and dropping out of school is detrimental not only to the students personally, but also to our nation.

Today more than one out of three adults without a high school diploma live in poverty, compared with one in five of those with a high school diploma and one in sixteen of those with an undergraduate degree (Gabe, 2015). "Results of a longitudinal study of nearly 4,000 students find that those who don't read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma than proficient readers. For the worst readers, those [who] couldn't master even the basic skills by third grade, the rate is nearly six times greater" (Hernandez, 2011, p. 3).

Incarceration rates of our citizens, especially for African-American and Hispanic

males, is alarming and is connected to academic failure and reading difficulties as well. "For nearly a century, researchers have reported that delinquent youth experience significant deficits in reading" (Katsiyannis, Ryan, Zhang, & Spann, 2008, p. 180). Similarly, adult prisoners have lower levels of literacy than non-inmate adults. (Greenberg, Dunleavy, & Kutner, 2007). Breaking literacy into four levels, with below basic as the lowest level and proficiency as the highest level, Greenberg, Dunleavy, and Kutner (2007) found that about 50% of adult prisoners perform at the lowest two levels on prose and document literacy and close to 80% perform at the lowest two levels in quantitative literacy. Therefore, accelerating literacy achievement during the first four years of schooling is critical, not only to at-risk students, but also to society.

A Framework for Effective Accelerated PK-3 Literacy Programs

Early literacy intervention is essential. The longer the delay, the wider the gaps become, and the more difficult it becomes to close them. Historically, intervention programs have not provided services to students until documented failure occurs. For students who enter school with literacy deficits, it is much easier to correct those deficits through acceleration during the first 18-27 months of schooling, rather than later when the deficits are much greater (Allington, 2011; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Guthrie, 2002). Furthermore, extensive data collected over the past 20 years reveal little, if any, sustained literacy gains from the billions of dollars spent on typical "pull out" and "push in" intervention programs, such as special education, Title 1, and RTI. For more details on the effectiveness of these programs, see the note at the end of this chapter.[i] Therefore, we propose a series of major changes in instructional management and strategies with a greater focus on prevention.

Response- to-Intervention (RTI) is a promising initiative. Rather than misidentifying students with short-term academic or behavioral difficulties as needing long-term special education services, RTI provides guidelines for a multi-tiered instructional process designed to provide progressively more intensive levels of instruction (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). RTI also includes screenings to identify students' reading levels, monitor their progress, and determine if instruction and/or interventions are working. Although many schools across the country have adopted RTI, they frequently have problems implementing the framework as designed (Sparks, 2015). Additionally, the plan has not been implemented within a reading acceleration framework as proposed in this document.

Our proposed reading acceleration framework promotes prevention, with traditional interventions reserved exclusively for students demonstrating severe behavior and/or learning deficits. Building on a multi-tiered model, we provide a specific plan to assist schools in achieving reading acceleration goals. Ten strategies are discussed in detail below.

1. **Develop accelerated reading goals in Grades PK-3, with a focus on prevention.** In order for the most at-risk students to catch up by Grade 4, they must make 1.5 years of literacy gains per year during Grades PK-3—that is, up to six years of gains in a four-year period (i.e., 2-3 years of progress in one year or 6 years of progress in 4 years) (Cunningham & Allington, 2011). To accomplish these gains, school leaders must develop strategies for accelerating literacy in Grades PK-3, and they must do so with these three goals in mind: (1) more prevention (i.e., Tier 1), resulting in reduced numbers of students who require intervention; (2) quality need-based interventions (i.e.,

Tiers 2 and 3), and (3) little or no retention.

The RTI model entails tiers of instruction. Like the base of a pyramid, the first tier must hold the greatest weight (Shapiro, 2008). Until we strengthen and place greater focus on Tier I, we will continue spending millions of dollars on Tier II and beyond with few, if any, gains to show for the effort and money spent. To prevent reading difficulties, our focus must be on Tier I. Then, quality need-based interventions are more feasible to offer for the smaller number of students who require additional instruction. Beyond Tier I, support for the majority of Individualized Educational Program (IEP) students is provided by the base teacher via Literacy Team members and, when needed, by using parallel block scheduling (PBS) principles to provide small group instruction throughout the school day until reading acceleration goals are achieved (Canady & Rettig, 2008, pp.145-252).

To accomplish this focus on prevention, *what if* we spend 15 percent of the money currently allocated to special education (SPED) on prevention strategies in the early grades? Such an expenditure can be justified and is recommended to improve Tier I availability and results (Allington, 2011; Ohio Department of Education, 2015). *What if* we redirect the millions of dollars currently being spent on mandated retentions in 16 states and Washington, DC, with similar legislation pending in at least 1 other state (Jacob, 2016)? At best, retention is unproductive; at worst, it is counterproductive, producing over-age and under-credited high school students at high risk of dropping out (Burrus & Roberts, 2012; David, 2008; Holmes & Matthews, 1984).

2. Craft a master schedule to reflect instructional priorities. Increasing time for literacy instruction within the school day is critical for literacy acceleration to occur. A

master schedule must promote early literacy acceleration led by a competent Literacy Team (LT) and focus primarily on Tier I instruction. Most SPED, Title I, and RTI personnel become members of the Literacy Team. By accelerating literacy achievement in the early grades, the need for Tier II and Tier III services can be greatly reduced (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007). An elementary school master schedule indicates what the school values. If a mission for accelerating literacy proficiency in the early grades is highly valued, then that value will be evident in the master schedule's allotment of time, space, personnel, and resources. When "valued programs" are crafted in the master schedule, those programs can be easily monitored, evaluated, and changed when needed. It also is critical that students entering school with literacy deficits have time to become accelerated readers before they are documented as failing and placed in various types of interventions.

Most elementary schools have 390 – 420 minutes in the school day. To achieve literacy acceleration in the primary grades, at least 180 minutes of daily literacy instruction must be included in the master schedule. Teachers must meet with Tier I groups for a minimum of 90 daily minutes of literacy core time. Additionally, the master schedule must include 60-90 minutes per day for assessment-based early literacy groups (ELGs) to meet (totaling 300 minutes weekly, minus transition time). It is preferable that the ELGs meet twice a day for at least 30 minutes – once in the morning for at least 30 minutes and again for 30 minutes in the afternoon. These assessment-based ELGs can be labeled Tier I, Tier II, Title I or other needed groupings, depending on the qualifications of students placed in the groups.

Some students will require even more time devoted to building word knowledge

and fluency (Hayes & Flanigan, 2014; Mesmer, Mesmer, & Jones, 2014; Walpole & McKenna, 2007). That additional time can occur during an intervention/enrichment (I/E) period included in the master schedule, and for some, additional time may be needed during the summer months (Canady & Canady, 2012; Canady, Canady, & Meek, 2017). Most I/E periods consist of 30-45 minutes per day. For students needing additional Tier I instruction or other interventions, the I/E period can provide an additional 150 – 225 minutes weekly of instructional interventions and support. The goal is to keep early struggling readers in Tier I instruction long enough for acceleration to have sufficient time to occur, which typically is at least three years. Transfer students often also need this time until "catch up" can occur. If students are labeled as failing before acceleration can be accomplished, they are often placed in intervention programs with less than promising results, as discussed in other sections of this document. (We may want to repeat the references here. Lynn)

Beyond increasing time for literacy, schools must develop well-crafted master schedules that provide time for all other programs. In the primary grades, if 180 minutes are given to literacy acceleration and 90 minutes to math and science, schools have 120 - 150 minutes remaining for (I/E), homeroom, encore (arts and PE), lunch, recess, and transitions. It is assumed that social studies in the primary grades will be integrated in the literacy block. Properly understood as the glue (or structure) that keeps the groups functioning daily, without fragmenting the school day, a well-crafted master school schedule, at a minimum, includes the following:

- Daily planning time for each literacy team that includes all members of the team;
- Specific blocks of time when literacy instruction occurs, with the number of minutes in each block varying by (1) grade level and (2) number of minutes in the school day;

- Specific time designated within each literacy block when the literacy team is assigned to work with core teachers and groups of students;

- Scheduled blocks of time for other subjects to be taught when the literacy team is not available, such as math, science, social studies, and the encore subjects (e.g., art, music, physical education, and technology); and

- When possible, blocks of time during which extended planning time can occur on a rotational basis. (See Canady & Canady (2012) for an example of how to build class time for Early Literacy Groups (ELGs) into the master school schedule and Canady and Rettig (2008, pp.83-88) for details on scheduling extended blocks of time for individual team planning).

For an example of a master schedule, see Table 2 at the end of this document entitled "Sample Master Schedule for Canbee Elementary School."

3. Provide Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). In most cases, individual teachers and support personnel cannot be highly successful without the full support of site-based leaders and (in most small districts) central office personnel. Employees working in a synergistic organization not only *know* where, when, and how to perform their roles, they also *feel* motivated and confident in that performance; they come to believe they are playing an important role in carrying out the mission of the organization. Smith and Gillespie (2007) recommend that we "[m]ake a strong connection between what is learned in the professional development and the teacher's own work context" (p. 217). Ottoson (1997) elaborates: "Devoting no time or little time for synthesis, integration, and planning beyond the [professional development] program is inadequate preparation for application. Helping participants anticipate and plan for barriers may facilitate practice changes" (p. 105).

4. **Develop a highly trained Literacy Team (LT).** Teachers are critical in

accelerating literacy proficiency in the early grades. Teachers hold the ultimate power over whether or not students receive quality, research-based instruction. The teacher's instructional skills – not to mention the working conditions that may or may not allow those skills to be implemented with fidelity – are more important than student-family variables in accelerating literacy proficiency (Rowe, 2003).

We advocate assembling well-trained Literacy Teams that function according to the principles of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). Common planning time for all involved in each LT must be provided. PK-3 teachers hold the tickets to improving the lives of millions (and, in turn, society), but they cannot reach their destination without administrative support and reasonable workloads.

LTs must be led by competent literacy leaders, often called Literacy Coaches. These leaders must possess the literacy expertise, leadership characteristics, and energy to train all team members, including Teacher Assistants (TAs), throughout the school year with a focus on continuous improvement. A well-trained LT provides sustained instruction in the essentials of effective literacy instruction (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension) in the context of an integrated literacy lesson in which identified skill needs are addressed, and authentic reading and writing tasks are applied. This integrated literacy instruction occurs across all grade levels (Bean & Dagen, 2012). Literacy Teams (LTs):

➢ Compensate for the variability that exists among teachers, the most critical variable in accelerating literacy in the early grades;

➢ Provide accountability by having highly trained LT members work in classrooms a minimum of twice daily;

➢ By following principles of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), LT's provide on-site, embedded staff development daily in classrooms and during extended planning sessions;

➢ Provide additional staffing so flexible, assessment-based skill groups can be served daily in multiple ways that no core teacher, working alone, can provide;

➢ Because LTs work primarily with groups in the core teacher's classroom, fragmentation of the school day is reduced by not having the typical "pull out' traffic throughout the school day;

➢ Because LT's work with multiple groups in the core teacher's classroom and all groups are being served at the same time, students receiving special services and interventions are not as stigmatized as when they are pulled from their classroom during whole group time;

➢ Because LT's plan with core teachers and share responsibilities for literacy acceleration, the LTs eliminate the loneliness and isolation teachers experience when working alone in a self-contained classroom; and

➢ LTs provide the blending and coordination of all services available in most elementary schools today rather than having multiple programs, such as Title I and RTI, operating as separate fiefdoms, with different personnel, rules, regulations and budgets.

5. Provide Quality (Mostly Embedded) Professional Development.

Professional development has traditionally been conducted in a sporadic manner—with professionals isolated from their work environment, their subject matter, their colleagues, etc.—and has thus failed to help implement and sustain positive change in

schools and school districts (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). "Job-embedded" professional development, in contrast, is carried out within the daily work environment and over an extended period of time, thereby nurturing change (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). When this kind of professional development is combined with a shared culture and a well-articulated mission, a spirit of synergy often emerges. In a synergistic organization, employees feel competent in their roles or, when uncertain, ask for assistance without apology; admitting need and asking for help are common behaviors in organizations committed to continuous improvement.[2]

 6. Emphasize Quantity, Quality, and Appropriateness of Texts. Students read more, understand more, and are more motivated to read when they have access to many books and can choose what they read (Allington & Gabriel, 2012). Elementary teachers therefore need a wide range of multiple texts that are appropriate for varying ability levels. It is important for each student to read appropriate books, written at their instructional and independent reading levels. If a child is reading books that are too difficult, his or her strategies break down. If the books are too easy, the child is not maximizing desired outcomes. The larger and more current the library collection, the higher student achievement tends to be (Lance, Rodney, & Hamilton-Pennell, 2005). Once students are reading accurately and understand what they are reading, less time is needed for instruction; for those students, their time can best be spent reading books of their own choosing that are on their independent reading level (Allington & Gabriel, 2012).

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[2] For more information, see "6 Essential Characteristics of a PLC," adapted from DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010.

7. Provide Tiered, Targeted, Integrated Instruction.[3] Effective instruction includes multiple tiers. The first tier represents classroom instruction that all students receive. The second tiers and beyond represent progressively more intensive interventions that some students receive. Instruction beyond Tier 1 is targeted based on needs identified through relevant assessments (Walpole & McKenna, 2009).

The instruction provided in each tier includes the five essentials of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). These essentials are offered in an integrated lesson designed to teach a particular skill or strategy and apply the skill or strategy to authentic reading or writing tasks. An integrated lesson plan facilitates student transfer of learning. This format is found in reading programs with demonstrated effectiveness such as Reading Recovery developed by Marie Clay and introduced in the United States by Ohio State University (Pinnell, 1989) or Book Buddies developed by Invernizzi and colleagues (Johnston, Invernizzi, Juel, & Lewis-Wagner, 2009).

8. Provide Small, Flexible, Assessment-based Groups. Small group reading instruction, the heart of a reading program, is the most important time of the school day for students to receive specific instruction in identified skills and strategies they need in order to progress as a reader. Small groups can range in size from 4 to 6 until students are advanced beginning readers (i.e., transitional), after which groups of 6 to 10 are acceptable (Tyner & Green, 2012; Walpole & McKenna, 2007; Walpole & McKenna, 2009).

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[3] For example lesson plans, see "Emergent Reader Lesson Plan for Grades K-1", available at at http://www.robertlynncanady.com/canady/payne/Emergent.pdf ; "Beginning Reader Lesson Plan for Grades K-1," available at http://www.robertlynncanady.com/canady/payne/Beginning.pdf; and "Intermediate Reader Lesson Plan for Grades K-1" available at http://www.robertlynncanady.com/canady/payne/Intermediate.pdf.

In addition, the homogeneity of the group, based on a particular focus of instruction, is critical to literacy achievement gains. Even when a teacher is highly qualified, students benefit more when the group instruction focuses on their specific literacy needs. For example, let's say a teacher is highly qualified to teach short vowel word features. Regardless of the teacher's qualifications, if 4 out of 6 students in a group have already mastered short vowel word features, then only one-third of the students will benefit from being in the group. Formative assessments must be used to frequently (i.e., daily, weekly) monitor progress and to move students from one group to another based on skill needs (Walpole & McKenna, 2016).

Because small group time is so valuable, it must be protected. Distractions and interruptions must be kept to a minimum. Especially in difficult-to-manage classrooms, rather than expecting teachers to lead small groups while simultaneously "managing" the remainder of the classroom, we recommend assembling well-trained Literacy Teams and/or using the principles of parallel block scheduling (PBS) to reduce class size during these specific literacy block times (Canady & Rettig, 2008; Canady, Canady, & Meek, 2017).

9. Frequently Monitor Student Progress. Literacy acceleration in the early grades requires frequent monitoring of student progress. Both formative and summative assessments are needed. Simple daily/weekly assessments are critical during the early stages of literacy development. Running records, skill-based quick checks, and trained teacher observations are a must for frequent assessment-based groupings and re-groupings to occur (Templeton & Gehsmann, 2014; Walpole & McKenna, 2007; Walpole & McKenna, 2009).

10. **Provide Instructional Program Evaluation**. For each student who has not reached proficiency in reading, a data baseline is established and individual goals are developed based on skill needs. The goals are consistent with an acceleration mindset, with an expectation of at least one-and-a-half years of growth for each school year for the first four years of school. These goals are monitored every 15-30 school days throughout the school year. The lower a child's baseline reading level, the more frequently the child must be monitored. Precision of reading level is important in order to maximize progress, and reading level tends to increase more frequently with lower level readers than with higher level readers.

As goals are met, new goals are established based on assessment data. If goals are not met, problem solving occurs to determine the underlying cause or causes. Before changing interventions, it is important to narrow the type of intervention needed and to ensure fidelity of implementation of the intervention. Explicit word-level instruction with explicit application to reading and writing must be observed during intervention time each day. Coordination between the reading instruction offered by the classroom teacher and by the interventionists is also important. The appropriateness and the level of the books the child is reading throughout the school day must also be monitored. For some students, literacy gains will occur with additional time. For others, an additional reading group may be needed to produce the desired accelerated outcomes. Literacy Team (LT) leaders who have expertise in monitoring and using both formal and informal assessments are critical to the success of an accelerated literacy program.

Regardless of socioeconomic status, if this Framework is implemented with

fidelity, virtually all primarily English-speaking students can be expected to become proficient readers within their first four years of school as measured by standardized reading assessments such as those conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Still, literacy is difficult to measure with a single test score. If and when we rely on the strategies discussed above – including increased instructional time, well-trained literacy instructors, and flexibly scheduled student groupings for instruction that address assessment-based needs – we will most likely succeed in increasing the numbers of students who achieve on or above grade level performance by the beginning of grade 4. The School Factors Questionnaire, found below in Table 1, can be helpful in observing and evaluating district-wide, school-wide, and classroom performance to maximize the possibility of an accelerated rate of reading achievement in an individual school.

Table 1: School Factors Questionnaire

SCHOOL FACTORS	Traditional Approach Focused on Status Quo Student Achievement	Progressive Approach Focused on Accelerated Student Achievement
Expectations/ Priorities/Goals. What are our expectations, priorities, and goals for student literacy performance?	• Our expectation is based on achieving on-grade level performance for each student. • We have not set school-wide, grade level and/or individual student goals toward this aim.	• We expect at least 80% of students to make 6 years of growth in 4 years of schooling. • We have set accelerated reading goals at incremental times throughout the PK-3 school years.
Organizing/ Scheduling Priorities. To what degree do we have a master schedule that supports our expectations/ priorities/goals?	• We do not have a master schedule. • We have a master schedule, but instructional priorities are not fully represented in the master schedule.	• We have a master schedule that reflects instructional priorities. • The master schedule includes time for multiple tiered levels of literacy instruction and other support services.
Community Organization/ Culture. How strong is our learning community and its orientation toward student achievement expectations/ priorities/goals?	• A few teachers in isolated classrooms achieve excellent results each year. • Most teachers work alone or with a partner. • Core teachers and support teachers seldom co-teach or plan together.	• The concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is fully enacted school-wide. • Planning meetings focus on student performance data, and student work is analyzed to determine instructional priorities.
Level/Type of Collaboration/ Teaming. To what degree are literacy teams and/or parallel block scheduling techniques enacted to support achievement of expectations/ priorities/goals?	• Literacy teaming and/or parallel block scheduling are not enacted or are enacted ineffectively. • Daily planning time is provided, but no extended planning time is available for all members of the Literacy Teams to thoroughly study data.	• Literacy Teams are functioning in our schools. • Parallel block scheduling (PBS) is in place or is not needed at this time to provide reduced groups during early stages of reading instruction. • Extended planning time is provided on a rotational basis.

Level/Type of Professional Development. To what degree is Professional Development oriented toward achievement of desired goals?	• PD is lacking or not central to important priorities and staff needs. • PD is external with little or no follow-through. • Adequate materials are not provided or are difficult to locate. • PD is not embedded.	• External PD is based on identified needs and includes quality follow through. • Most PD is embedded. • Adequate materials needed for reading acceleration to occur are provided and can be easily located.
Alignment of Curriculum with Standards, and Assessments.	• The curriculum is not aligned with standards and assessments.	• The curriculum is aligned with standards and assessments.
Quality, Quantity, Appropriateness of Curriculum and Texts.	• Students do not read appropriate texts (i.e., on their independent and instructional levels) and/or texts are not demanding. • Texts often are not of sufficient quantity and quality. • Texts are not easily accessed by all teachers. • Students spend time reading but are not held accountable for their reading.	• Students read appropriate texts (i.e., on their independent and instructional levels), and some texts are demanding. • Texts consistently are appropriate and of quality. • Students spend time reading multiple types of texts and are held accountable for their reading.
Instructional Tiers, Quantity, Quality, Appropriateness of Instruction.	• Sufficient time is not spent daily in assessment-based small groups, and groups are not as flexible as are needed. • Teachers do not provide integrated lessons, and some teachers do not provide appropriate scaffolding.	• Sufficient time is spent in assessment-based small groups (at least 300 minutes weekly). • Teachers provide integrated lessons. • Teachers provide appropriate scaffolding.

Flexible Grouping. What is our small group focus? To what degree are groups flexed to maintain homogenous skill groupings?	• Early in the school year each small group has a specific focus based on assessed needs. • As students make progress, some move to another group but not until specific times in the calendar year. • Homogenous groupings vary by teachers and demands of various intervention programs.	• Each small group has a specific focus based on assessed needs. • As students make progress, they move to another group based on assessed needs. • Controlled homogenous groupings are maintained.
Assessments: Screening and Progress Monitoring.	• Summative assessments may or may not occur. • Formative assessments do not occur or are not frequent (daily, weekly) and/or are not used to identify student needs, to flexibly group students, and/or to establish instructional priorities.	• Summative assessments occur. • Formative assessments are performed daily or weekly) and are used to identify student needs, to flexibly group students, and to establish instructional priorities.
Instructional Program Evaluation.	• Each element of the literacy program is not specifically evaluated. • Evaluation is not used to improve the instructional program.	• Each element of the literacy program is specifically evaluated. • Evaluation guides program improvement throughout the school year.

Conclusion

There is compelling evidence that the focus of public education has become heavily weighted toward intervention and retention rather than prevention. Schools will continue spending more money than necessary on intensive Tier II and III interventions, plus billions of dollars on special education until elementary schools place a laser-like focus on Tier I prevention and literacy in the early grades. This proposed Reading Acceleration Framework prompts educators to comprehensively evaluate and improve school factors in order to progress toward the goal of literacy performance at accelerated rates.

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[i] Many studies have examined the effectiveness of common intervention programs such as special education, Title 1, and RTI. Some findings suggest that these intervention programs may not be as effective in improving literacy as anticipated. While there is evidence that special education can be successful when based on principles of effective instruction (Kavale, 2005; Kavale, Forness, & Siperstein, 1999), there is also evidence that in comparison to regular education classes, special education programs do not improve children's academic outcomes (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980) and do not enhance either the quantity or quality of reading/language arts instruction (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989). A recent study similarly found that children with intellectual disabilities who were fully included in general education classrooms with support had greater improvement in literacy skills than comparable children attending special schools (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012). Kavale and colleagues (1999) concluded that the effectiveness of special education is often undermined by poor implementation and philosophical disputes about special education practice.

Researchers have also investigated the impact of Title 1. The most common category of Title 1 spending reported by schools is teacher professional development, with 81% of schools reporting spending in this area (Dynarski & Kainz, 2015). However, several large studies have found no evidence that intensive professional development improves student achievement in reading or math. Schools also reported spending Title 1 funds on after-school programs and technology, which similarly have been shown not to be effective in improving student academic outcomes (Dynarski & Kainz, 2015).

Lastly, a recent study of Response to Intervention (RTI) practices revealed that first-graders who received Tier 2 or Tier 3 reading intervention services had lower scores than peers who did not receive the intervention (Balu et al., 2015; Sparks, 2015). Moreover, there was no difference in reading outcomes for children who received the reading intervention in Grades 2 and 3 and those who did not (Balu et al., 2015).

In sum, these studies provide evidence that special education, Title 1, and RTI at the least need further research to determine if they are effective in improving literacy. The CanRead Framework is built on the assumption that if more of the money spent on these intervention programs were spent on prevention programs in the early grades, it is reasonable to expect greater improvement in literacy for a greater number of children. The CanRead Framework stresses prevention, instead of intervention, to improve literacy in early grades.

Table 2. Sample Master Schedule for Canbee Elementary School

Master Schedule for Canbee Elementary School (Illustrating PK-2 Early Literacy Groups (ELGs) Meeting Twice Daily and Including RTI Tiers, ELL, SPED and Title I Groups)									
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Pre-K				Recess/Lunch		I/E			
Kindergarten	Math/Literacy		*ELGs and Tier I core Literacy LT-1		Lunch/Recess	I/E	Encore/Plan	Repeat A.M. ELGs and continue Tier I core Literacy LT-1	
Grade 1	*ELGs and Tier I core Literacy LT-1		Math/Science		Recess/Lunch	Repeat A.M. ELGs and continue Tier I core Literacy LT-1		Encore/Plan	I/E
Grade 2	*ELGs and Tier I core Literacy LT-2		Math/Science		Lunch/Recess	Encore/Plan	Repeat A.M. ELGs and continue Tier I core Literacy LT-2		I/E
Grade 3	Reading/Language Arts		ELGs, if needed, LT-2	Encore/Plan	I/E LT-2	Lunch/Recess	Math/Science/Social Studies		
Grade 4			Encore/Plan			Lunch/Recess			I/E
Grade 5			I/E			Recess/Lunch			Encore/Plan
I/E			5		3	PK, K			1, 2, 4
LT-1	1	1	K	K	Lunch	1	1	K	K
LT-2	2	2	2, 5 (I/E)	Plan	3 (I/E)	Lunch	2	2	1, 4 (I/E)
Lunch/Recess				PK	K, 1, 2	3, 4, 5			
Encore	**Extended PLAN Time		4	3	Lunch	2	K	1	5

*ELG=Early Literacy Group   HR=Homeroom   I/E=Intervention/Enrichment Periods   SC/SS=Science/Social Studies   LT=Literacy Team   I/S=Independent Study and student support   Encore=Art, Music, PE, etc.

Plan: Available to provide 75-90 minutes of planning time for each encore group on a 7- or 8-day rotation. For details see Canady & Rettig, 2008, Chapter 8 and pp. 83-86).

Arrows indicate how groupings can occur easily across grade levels.

See next page for additional notes about and explanation of the Canbee Master Schedule.

Canbee Elementary School Master Schedule Notes

Note 1: Periods are 43-50 minutes, depending on the number of minutes in the school day.

Note 2: For additional information on implementing an intervention/enrichment period in an elementary school, see Canady, R.L. & Rettig, M.D. (2008, pp. 93-125) and www.robertlynncanady.com.

Note 3: Lunch Periods may need adjustments, depending on when school begins in the morning.

Note 4: Having three parallel blocks for upper grades helps with departmentalization as well as accommodating principles of parallel block scheduling (PBS).

Note 5: Most elementary schools have between 390 and 420 minutes in the school day. The Canbee master schedule includes 180 minutes for literacy instruction in grades PK-3, 90 minutes for math and science, 40+ minutes for interventions and enrichment (I/E), 45+ minutes for lunch/recess, and 45-50 minutes for encore classes. Typically, at these grade levels social studies is included in the literacy block. If literacy acceleration is to occur in grades PK-2, a minimum of 90 minutes daily should be designated for Tier I core literacy instruction, which leaves 90 minutes for two 45-minute periods or three 30-minute periods for groups that can be designated Tier I for students needing literacy acceleration, Tier II or Title I, depending on individual student assessments. Because the Canbee schedule includes a 40+ (I/E) period at all grade levels, 200+ additional weekly minutes are available for assessment-based services, such as one of the RTI tiers, SPED, ELL and/or Title I. Because all students in PK-2 grades have access to three 40+ minute periods or three 30-minute and one 40+ minute period for assessment-based groupings, all students needing literacy acceleration can meet daily for assessment-based instruction during the morning ELG core literacy block and again during the afternoon core literacy block. Students needing acceleration still have 70+ minutes daily remaining for additional required services, such as Tier II, Title I, various IEP designations, or ELL.

Note 6: To illustrate, Bobby enters PK or K with the literacy skills of a 3-or 4-year old. In the Canbee schedule, he could receive 90 minutes daily of Tier I literacy instruction, a 30-minute assessment-based skill group during the ELG Tier I morning block and again in the afternoon block, and have 70+ minutes remaining for Tier II, Title I, ELL or an IEP designated service such as speech therapy. The 70+ minutes likely would be divided into two 35-minute periods that meet daily; however, if the service were something like physical therapy, it might be better to meet for 70+ minutes every other day (EOD), or on another type of rotation, such as Day 1, 3, 6.

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